***The Four-Sentence Story***

**Step 1)** Pick a name out of the phone book (see below). This will be your protagonist.

**Step 2)** What does your protagonist want? (Invent a desire that fits the name.)

**Step 3)** What obstacle stands between your protagonist and his desire?

**Step 4)** How will your protagonist attempt to overcome his obstacle?

**Step 5)** Will the protagonist get what he wants or something else?

**Step 6)** Write your four-sentences story.

Sentence #1: Identify your protagonist and his desire. Also, mention the time and place in which the story is set.

Sentence #2: Identify the obstacle your protagonist faces.

Sentence #3: Describe how the protagonist will attempt to overcome his obstacle.

Sentence #4: Describe the result of the protagonist’s efforts to overcome his obstacle.

**Step 7)** Now, treat each of the above sentences as DDL prompts. Flesh out the specific details of the story using imagery, figurative language, dialogue, rhythm, etc. Turn these four sentences into several full paragraphs of description. (At least five to ten paragraphs.)

**Step 8)** Show your story to a peer. Ask your partner which parts of the story seem to need more development.

**Step 9**) Add more details as directed by your partner.

**Step 10)** Type the story and place it in your portfolio (if you like it).

EXAMPLE:

1. Name: Herbert Udalgo
2. Desire: Before he dies, he wants to forgive his wife Louise, who had an affair 35 years ago.
3. Obstacle: He still feels betrayed and can’t get past the hurt.
4. Action: He will make love to her on his deathbed, hoping to see something in her eyes that will inspire compassion.
5. Result: Her eyes will be closed, and he will die feeling as if he never really knew who she was even after 40 years of marriage.
6. Four-sentence story: On his deathbed, gasping for air, Herbert Udalgo wishes he could forgive his wife Louise for the act of betrayal she committed thirty-five years ago. But with each feeble breath, the betrayal still stabs at him. When Louise enters the room with a glass of water for her husband, Herbert knows what he must do; as they make love, Herbert searches Louise’s eyes for a sign of some sort—a reason to forgive her—but Louise keeps her eyes shut tight, and Herbert sees nothing. As she drifts off to sleep beside him, Herbert takes his last breaths and wonders who this woman is, his wife of forty years.
7. The story:

Herbert’s Left Lung

Herbert Udalgo has a tumor the size of a baseball in his left lung. The doctors have sent him home and put him on hospice care. There isn’t much time left. Alone in his bed, he replays his life. A good life by most accounts. Three successful kids, a rewarding career, a beautiful wife. But Herbert can’t get past something that happened thirty-five years ago. He can’t get past the love note he found, a love note that wasn’t meant for him, a love note his beautiful wife Louise wrote to another man. Herbert wants nothing more than to let go of the past, surrender to it, and forgive his wife for her indiscretion. But he can’t. He still has so many unanswered questions.

Outside his bedroom window, snow begins to fall, and Herbert gasps for air, the pain in his chest stabbing at him—a wound that will never heal. The grandfather clock in the hallway chimes, and Louise enters the room in her housecoat, carrying a glass of water.

She’s still as beautiful as ever, her long hair cascading down around her shoulders, her eyes twinkling in the faint blue light cast by the muted television in the corner. Louise smiles at Herbert and helps him sit up and sip the water as he swallows another pointless pill. He settles back into his pillow, and Louise lies down beside him.

Herbert can feel Louise’s warmth there next to him in their bed, and he reaches for her. One last time, he thinks, hoping to look into those sparkling eyes of hers and see something there that will trigger eternal compassion and ultimate forgiveness. Louise rises and leans into him. They kiss, and Herbert searches her face in the flickering light of the TV, but her eyes are closed, and they remain that way.

Later, as Louise drifts off to sleep beside him, and Herbert takes his last few agonizing breaths, he wonders if Louise has forgiven herself, or if she ever even thinks about the affair anymore. And he wonders too who she was, this wife of his, this woman with whom he spent the last forty years of his life.

The clock in the hall chimes again, and on the television, a celebrity is endorsing a hair-care product, asking if Herbert if he wants to look younger. Herbert smiles and disappears, knowing ,finally, that it’s okay not to know all the answers.

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